

Rules of the Game

All About Clerics (Part One)

By Skip Williams



Most **D&D** players feel vulnerable, if not downright naked, without a **cleric** in the group. A cleric's **spells** and class features can literally make the difference between life and death for a party. Unfortunately, the rules governing a cleric's extensive array of spells and class abilities can cause confusion when players and DMs start exploring the limits of the cleric's powers. We'll try to clear some of that up.

Alignment

Most clerics are associated with a deity. When a cleric has a patron deity, his **alignment** must be the same as the deity's or within one step of his deity's alignment on either the lawful-chaotic axis or the good-evil axis, but not both. A cleric cannot be neutral (that is, neutral on both the law-chaos and the good-evil axis) unless his deity also is neutral. The table below shows the possibilities:

Deity Alignment	Possible Cleric Alignments
Lawful Good	Lawful Good Lawful Neutral Neutral Good
Neutral Good	Neutral Good Lawful Good Chaotic Good
Chaotic Good	Chaotic Good Neutral Good Chaotic Neutral
Lawful Neutral	Lawful Neutral Lawful Good Lawful Evil
Neutral	Neutral Neutral Good Lawful Neutral Chaotic Neutral Neutral Evil
Chaotic Neutral	Chaotic Neutral

Chaotic Good

Chaotic Evil

Lawful Evil

Lawful Evil

Lawful Neutral

Neutral Evil

Neutral Evil

Neutral Evil

Lawful Evil

Chaotic Evil

Chaotic Evil

Chaotic Evil

Chaotic Neutral

Neutral Evil

A cleric could have no deity at all (see page 32 in the *Player's Handbook*). A cleric with no deity can have any alignment, but the cleric's choice of alignment can affect which clerical **domains** the cleric can choose (see the next section).

A cleric of a chaotic, evil, good, or lawful deity has a particularly powerful aura corresponding to the deity's alignment (see the *detect evil* spell description for details), no matter what the cleric's alignment actually is. For example, a neutral good cleric of a lawful good deity has auras of law and good.

A cleric without a deity still has an alignment aura if he chooses the **Chaos**, **Evil**, **Good**, or **Lawful** domains. The aura matches the domain (or domains).

Cleric Spells

In most people's minds, the cleric is primarily a spellcaster, and a cleric's spells can prove powerful indeed. The cleric class description on page 32 in the *Player's Handbook* covers the cleric's spellcasting ability in some detail. The text covering divine spells on pages 179-180 provides additional information. Here's an overview of the basics:

- A cleric casts **divine spells**.

Divine spells are not subject to arcane **spell failure** chances from armor and shields. Certain divine spells might have different material or focus components than the arcane versions of the same spells. See page 174 in the *Player's Handbook* for details. Also see Rules of the Game, Reading Spell Descriptions, [Part Three](#).

The number of spells a cleric can use each day is shown on Table 3-6 in the *Player's Handbook*.

- **Wisdom** governs a cleric's spells.

To prepare or cast a spell, a cleric must have a Wisdom score of at least 10 + the spell's level. For example, a cleric must have a Wisdom score of at least 11 to prepare or cast a 1st-level spell and must have a Wisdom

score of at least 13 to prepare or cast a 3rd-level spell. A cleric with a Wisdom score of 9 or less cannot prepare or cast any spells at all.

If a cleric suffers a Wisdom reduction after preparing spells for a day (from a Wisdom-damaging attack, for example) the cleric may be unable to cast a prepared spell. The spell becomes available to cast again if the cleric recovers the lost Wisdom. Even if the Wisdom loss turns out to be permanent, the cleric eventually can make use of the **spell slot** that contains the unusable spell (see the notes on spell preparation in Part Two on slots for details).

When a cleric casts a spell, the cleric's Wisdom score determines the spell's save **Difficulty Class** (if the spell allows a **save** at all). The DC is 10 + **spell level** + the cleric's Wisdom **modifier** at the time the cleric casts the spell. A reduction in a cleric's Wisdom score (even a temporary one) reduces the save DCs for the cleric's spells if that reduction is sufficient to lower the cleric's Wisdom modifier (assuming that the cleric can still cast the spell -- see the previous section). An increase in a cleric's Wisdom score (even a temporary one) increases the save DCs for the cleric's spells if that increase is sufficient to raise the cleric's Wisdom modifier.

A cleric's Wisdom score might also give him one or more bonus spells each day, as shown on Table 1-1 in the *Player's Handbook* and explained in the accompanying text.

- Most of a cleric's spells must be prepared in advance.

A cleric prepares spells through prayer and meditation. A cleric doesn't need to use spellbooks or other aids to prepare spells. Part Two examines clerical spell preparation in detail.

- Clerics have a limited ability to cast some spells spontaneously.

Spontaneous casting is the ability to take any prepared spell and cast it as another spell of the same or lower level. A cleric taps into the stored spell's energy and channels it into another spell. When you use a prepared spell to spontaneously cast another spell, you use up the prepared spell.

A good cleric (or a neutral cleric of a good deity) can spontaneously cast **cure spells**, and a *cure* spell is any spell with "cure" in its name, such as *cure light wounds*.

An evil cleric (or a neutral cleric of an evil deity) can spontaneously cast **inflict spells**, and an *inflict* spell is any spell with "inflict" in its name, such as *inflict light wounds*.

A cleric who is neither good nor evil and whose deity is neither good nor evil can convert spells to either *cure* spells or *inflict* spells (player's choice). Once the player makes this choice, it cannot be reversed. This choice also determines whether the cleric **turns** or **commands** undead (see Part Three).

- A cleric can cast domain spells.

A cleric receives an extra spell slot each day for each spell level he can cast.

A cleric chooses two domains from among those belonging to his deity. As noted earlier, a cleric doesn't always have to have a deity. A cleric without a deity simply chooses two domains. In any case, a cleric can select an alignment domain (Chaos, Evil, Good, or Law) only if his alignment matches that domain. For example, a cleric can choose the Law domain only if his alignment has a lawful component. This is true even if the cleric is dedicated to a lawful deity.

A domain gives the cleric access to a domain spell at each spell level he can cast, from 1st on up (as well as a **granted power**, see Part Three). This gives the cleric access to two domain spells at a given spell level, and a cleric prepares one or the other each day in his domain spell slot. If a domain spell is not on the cleric spell list, a cleric can prepare it only in his domain spell slot.

- A cleric's alignment limits the spells he can use.

A cleric can't cast spells of an alignment opposed to his own or his deity's (if he has one). A spell has an alignment if it has an alignment descriptor (chaos, evil, good, and law). See page 174 of the *Player's Handbook* and Rules of the Game, Reading Spell Descriptions, [Part Two](#) for details. For example, a neutral good cleric of a lawful good deity cannot use spells with the chaos or evil descriptors.

What's Next?

That covers clerical alignments and the basics of cleric spells. Next week we'll consider clerical spell preparation.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon Magazine* for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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